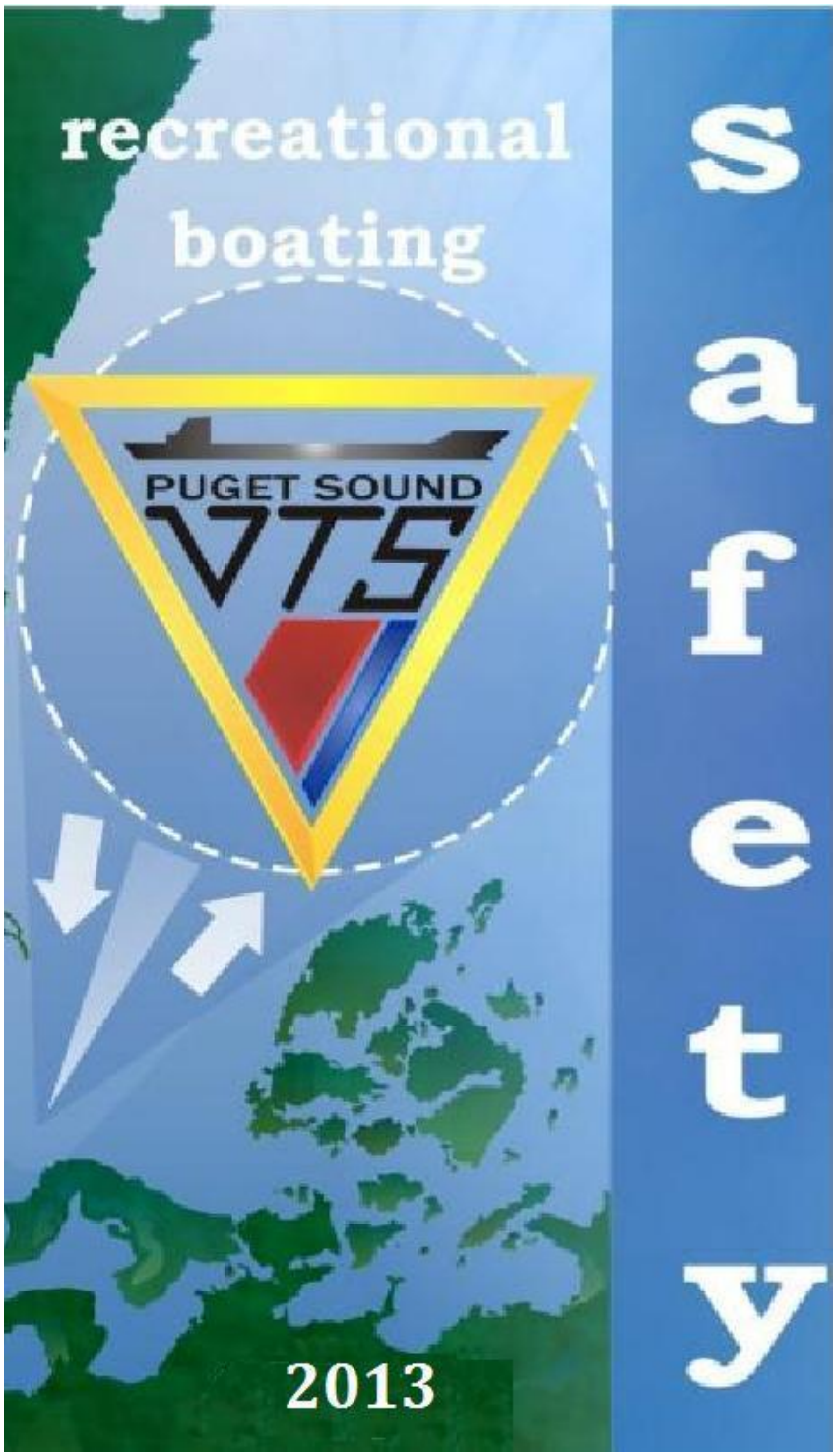

recreational
boating
PUGET SOUND
VTS
2013
safety

Information concerning…

Required conduct in, or near the traffic separation scheme, and related safety issues in sharing the waters of the Puget Sound with commerce.

If you operate…

- **Any waterborne craft of less than 20 meters (65.6 ft.), powered or not, or**
- **A larger sailing vessel – while *under* sail,**

Either of which is not intended for commercial purposes and without hire, then the information in this flyer is intended for you – the recreational boater of Puget Sound.

Power-driven 20 meters or greater should contact Puget Sound Vessel Traffic (see back cover) for additional requirements.

A brief introduction,

Puget Sound Vessel Traffic Service (PSVTS) is a marine traffic service operated by USCG Sector Puget Sound. Also known as **"Seattle Traffic,"** we provide navigational assistance to the maritime community of Puget Sound similar to the methods used by the FAA in providing air traffic control to aviators.

We provide our service by use of the following methods:

- **Radar and Automatic Information Systems (AIS).**
- **Vessel movement reporting** – VHF-FM radio channels 5A, and 14.
- **Traffic separation scheme (TSS)** – buoys, and charted traffic lanes that direct the flow of traffic.

PSVTS monitors 230,000 vessel movements a year in the 3,500 square mile Puget Sound area. These vessel transits are comprised of mainly large commercial and government craft such as freighters, container ships, tankers, coastal freighters, tugs, fishing vessels, tour boats, Navy ships, and ferries. All of these vessels are required to participate in whole, or in part with PSVTS under 33 Code of Federal Regulations Part 161. Seattle Traffic operates as part of the Cooperative Vessel Traffic System, in which the United States and Canada share responsibilities for traffic safety.

Your responsibilities

Unless specifically directed by PSVTS, the recreational boater is exempt from participation with the VTS in all but the required conduct that governs ALL vessels in, or near a TSS.
Reference Rule 10 for International Waters as established by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and published in the Navigation Rules by the USCG.
http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=navRulesContent

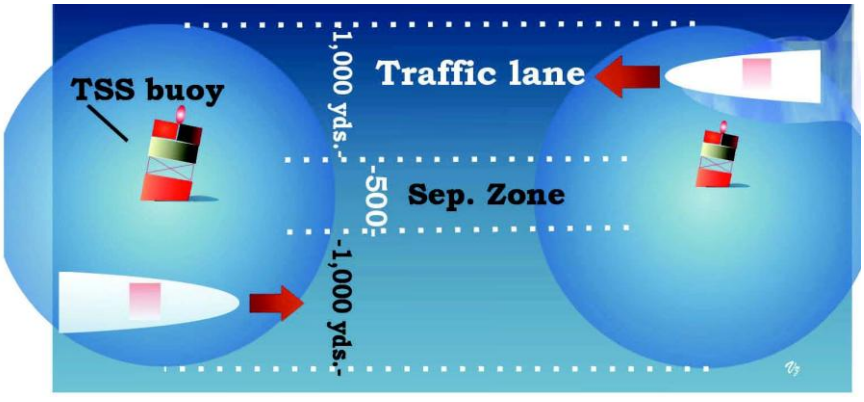
Passive listening of the appropriate VTS frequency for your area is highly encouraged! Being tuned din to PSVTS is free, and a great source of timely traffic information that could save your life, loved ones, and property. *See inside back cover for additional guidance in operator responsibility.*

Rule 10 and the TSS…

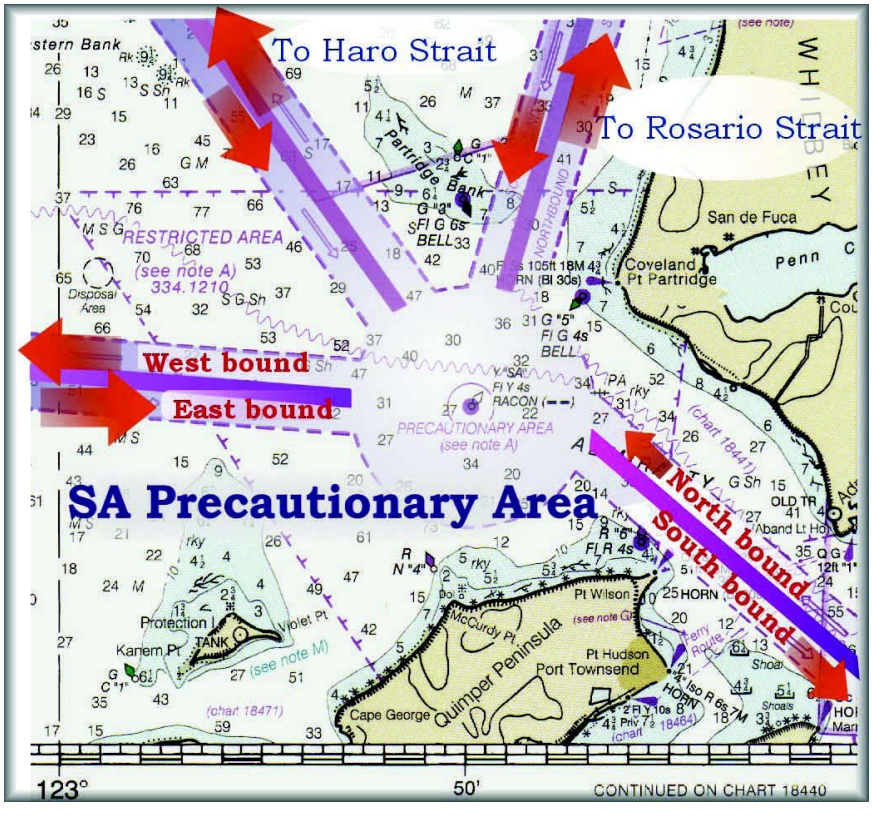
International "**Rules of the Road**" apply everywhere in the Puget Sound, including Lake Washington. These rules not only dictate vessel conduct when meeting, overtaking, or crossing another vessel, but also specify vessel conduct near a TSS where one exists. Chances are you are familiar with the charted traffic lanes in the Puget Sound. If you are not, obtain a nautical chart of the area (s) you enjoy and familiarize yourself with them. See opposite page for an example. The traffic lane network in the Puget Sound begins at buoy J *(Juliet)* 10 nautical miles (NM) NW of Cape Flattery and continues to Tacoma's buoy TC *(Tango Charlie)*, with Rosario strait, and Haro Strait bound branches stemming from buoy SA *(Sierra Alpha)*.

Our TSS has two traffic lanes with a separation zone between them to divide east bound shipping traffic from west bound shipping traffic, and north and south. TSS buoys are placed at the termination/turning areas of the lanes and serve to mark the center of the separation zone. If you wish to avoid oncoming traffic, you always keep the separation zone, and buoys on your port side. Under this arrangement you will meet all oncoming traffic **"port to port"** with room to spare. The whole idea here is vessel predictability and safety.

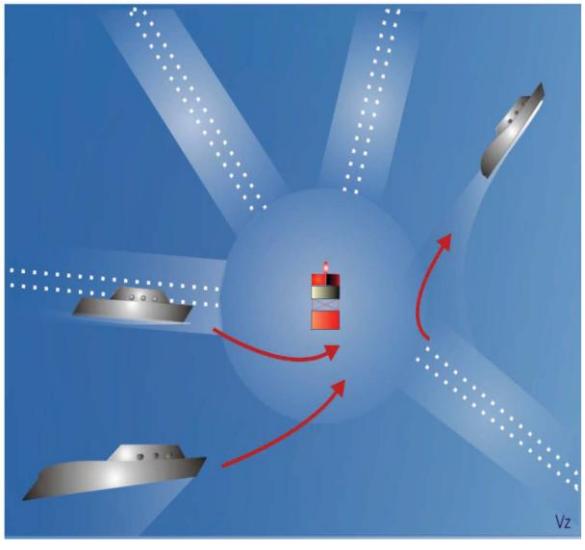
You do not need our permission to use these charted lanes! Simply abide by the TSS rules: Proceed in the direction of traffic. If joining or leaving, do so at a TSS buoy by passing the buoy on your port side. When not near a buoy, join or leave a lane ***with*** the direction of traffic. Avoid the separation zone as much as possible. If it is necessary to cross the lanes (and separation zone) then do so at right angles to minimize the time crossing. When not using the lanes, you are responsible for knowing the location of the TSS, and avoiding others using it. Above all, don't impede traffic. Each year, numerous incidents involve boaters being in the way, or, proceeding the ***wrong way*** in a traffic lane. Often, the vessels they obstruct are large container ships or tanker that cannot maneuver sharply to avoid them.



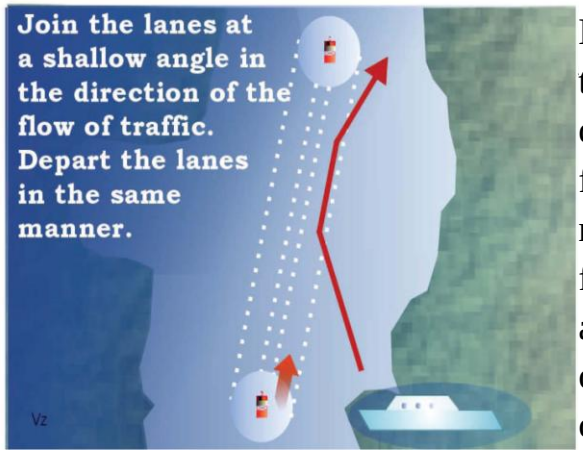
The traffic separation scheme consists of TSS buoys, and a 500 yard separation zone between two 1,000 yard traffic lanes.



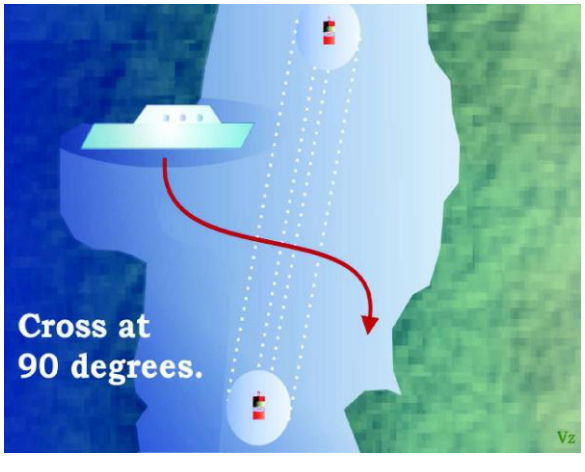
Inset from NOAA chart 18400. The "Sierra Alpha" buoy near Port Townsend is a major convergence area for vessel traffic. Combined with strong currents and pervasive fog, the SA precautionary area can be challenging to navigate.



Join or leave the TSS at termination points. Unless in an emergency, always leave the TSS buoys to port.

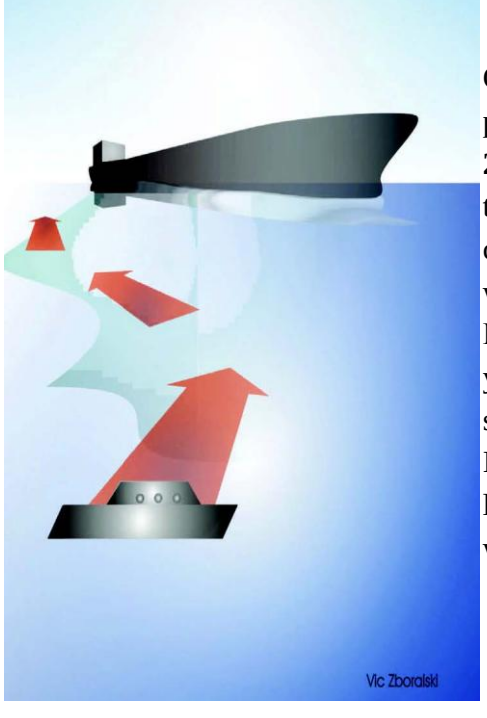


Enter and leave a traffic lane in the direction of traffic. Be careful not to impede faster vessels astern of you, or overtake too closely.



Avoid the separation zone. If you must cross the lanes, then do so at right angles to minimize crossing time.

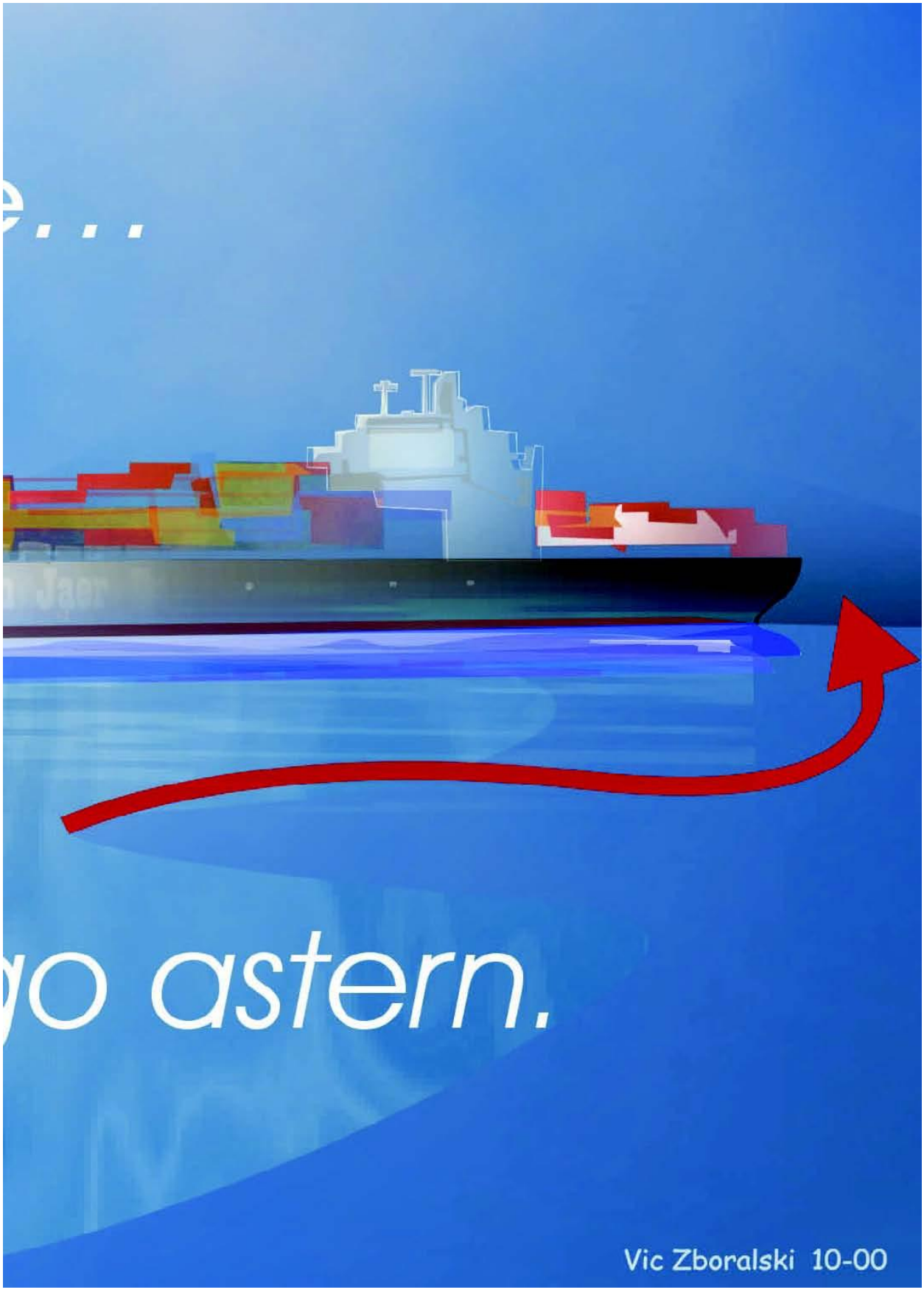
When not using the lanes, avoid the TSS by as wide a margin as possible. Be mindful of your vessel's position at all times.



Clear the lanes as quickly as possible. **Any vessel less than 20 meters shall not impede** the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel. Don't cause a grounding or put your life at risk by thinking a ship can get out of your way. It is more prudent to avoid large ships and go astern whenever possible.

A 650' ship, at 11 knots requires 12 ship lengths to come to an emergency stop. A 90 degree turn requires .33 NM!


Play it safe
Always g


e...
go astern.
Vic Zboralski 10-00

Radio communications,

Your participations as a recreational boater, if mindful of the TSS, satisfies your requirement with "Seattle Traffic." Any further participation is strictly voluntary, unless directed by the VTS. If you use a VHF-FM radio please follow these guidelines:

- You are encouraged to monitor Seattle Traffic, but we ask that you limit your communications to essential navigational safety information, and emergencies.
- Know the proper VTS (Seattle Traffic) frequency for the area you are navigation. *See following page.*
- Listen before keying, do not **"walk on"** other communications.
- Always use low power to reduce interference.
- Monitor designated frequencies 13, and 16. Channel 13 is designated for bridge-to-bridge communications and is a requirement for vessels 20 meters and larger. It is also used by Seattle Traffic as a secondary frequency. Bridges and Ballard Locks use channel 13 for emergencies and communications at night. Channel 16 is the designated international distress and calling frequency. You are encouraged to use channel 16 **in an emergency** to contact Coast Guard search and rescue units.

PUGET SOUND VTS

Typical calling locations:

⇒ **Channel 14** Hood Canal, Shilshole/Seattle, Bremerton, Bainbridge, Tacoma, Olympia—waters south of Nodule and Possession onWhidbey Island.

⇒ **Channel 5A** Everett, Port Townsend, LaConner, Anacortes, Bellingham, San Juan "Archipelago, Port Angeles, Neah Bay, Port San Juan, B.C. *Seattle Traffic monitors vessel traffic in Canadian waters in the Strait of Juan de Fuca! Victoria Traffic monitors all traffic in Haro Strait and the Victoria area, and waters north of Patos Island on channel 11.*

Special areas

The TSS is a total of 2,500 yards wide with the exception of the Strait of Juan de Fuca where the lanes are each 2,000 yards wide with a varying width separations zone. All traffic lanes, with magenta colored separation zones are clearly printed on nautical charts.

Rosario Strait is a narrow channel that has a single, 1,000 yard wide traffic lane and no separation zone. It is located between TSS buoys "RB" and "C." One way traffic for large commercial vessels-typically laden takers, is imposed by VTS in this area. Due to the narrowness of the channel, and the potential of a major environmental catastrophe, it is strongly recommended that recreational boater wait until the channel has cleared to cross.

Leaving C, CA, SA to starboard: C, and CA are located in northern Rosario Strait, and SA is located north of Port Townsend. These buoys mark challenging areas in the Puget sound and it is not uncommon to encounter tugs with tows, and large vessels such as tankers that, due to the special constraints of their tow, or inability to turn sharply, "cut the turn," or leave the buoy to starboard. This maneuver, for these specific buoys, is deemed a lesser navigation risk than properly leaving the buoy on their port side. The Master, Mate, or Pilot radio their intent to deviate from the rules to Seattle Traffic prior to the act. Almost without exception, a south bound tug and tow will pass east of SA directly from Partridge Bank to Point Wilson, or be asked to stay east of the lanes until traffic has cleared. On the other hand, some vessels stay close to Pt. Wilson west bound to avoid the weather and currents. A southbound taker departing the refineries in Ferndale and Cherry Point will pass east of CA to avoid an awkwardly sharp turn. South bound vessels cut buoy C to depart for Bellingham. **In an emergency, deep drafts and tugs may find it necessary to enter the separation zone anywhere in the TSS to avoid hazards such as nets, or small boats that are not properly observing Rule 10.**

Much of the VTS area is without traffic lanes or radar coverage. The area east of Whidbey Island, the interior of the San Juan Archipelago, Hood Canal, all waters south of Pt. Defiance, and most of Colvos Passage are without a TSS or radar. Vessels that are required to participate transmit position reports via VHF-FM on the appropriate VTS frequency.

Perennial issues in safety

"I have a sailboat, and have the right of way." **Not always!**
If your sailboat is 20 meters or greater, and your motor is running, then you are considered a power-driven vessel underway, and the vessel to starboard has the right of way-as stated in Rule 15 of the navigation Rules. Also, sailing vessels shall not impede the safe passage of any power driven vessel following a traffic lane!

"I go where the fish are"
If you are a non-commercial sport fisherman of less than 20 meter, you shall not impede the passage of a power-driven vessel using the TSS, or *any* vessel that can safely navigate only with a narrow channel or fairway-*and so far as practicable keep clear of the separation zone.* References to "a vessel engaged in fishing," and being allowed to fish the separation zone under Rule 10, is per the Rule 3(d) definition which excludes trolling and other maneuverable methods.

"I've sounded the danger signal, and I can't get any response out of this small boat ahead of me…"
Radio contact is an important safety feature-*particularly in fog.* You may possess GPS, radar, or some other means of fixing your position, but it does not relay your position or intentions to other vessels. Invest in a VHF marine radio, and monitor channel 13-regardless of the size of your vessel. **Be seen!** Radar reflecting material are recommended for vessels of non-metallic composition. This will help others to detect your vessel by radar.

Advice from the Captains

Know and follow the "Rules of the Road." Be aware that specific rules apply in the vicinity of large ships when operation in narrow channels (Rule 9) and traffic separation schemes (Rule 10).

Stay clear of tankers and freighters. They have limited ability to maneuver and risk grounding or colliding with other boats if forced to take evasive action.

Take early positive action to avoid close quarters situations. Avoid crossing ahead of, or operation close to a deep draft ship. Never cross between a tug and their tow, be wary of submerged apparatus trailing barges.

Develop a situational awareness of all the vessels in your vicinity. Be aware that strict adherence to the Rules of the Road may not be practical in crowded situations (Rule 2).

Maintain a proper lookout. Autopilot does not relieve you of the responsibility of keeping a good lookout.

Take early and substantial action to indicate your intention to change course and speed. *Show a side.*
Use your navigation lights between sunset, sunrise, and in restricted visibility.

Remember

Every mariner has responsibility for safety and survival on the water. Nothing in this pamphlet relieves a vessel operator of their responsibility to adhere to all other applicable State and Federal regulation, as well as prudent seamanship and safe navigational practices. Plan your voyage before venturing out-check local weather, tides and currents, and leave a sail plan with a relative or loved one with instructions to contact the coast Guard if you are overdue. Use more than one method to fix your position, and know your boat's systems thoroughly. A cellular phone is not recommended as a safe alternative to, nor does it replace the effectiveness of a VHF-FM radio

A container ship collides with a 35 ft. pleasure craft near Des Moines, WA. The owners of the yacht were unaware of the existence of the VTS and the TSS. *Photo courtesy of the USCG, Sector Puget Sound, ~ 1993*

Security -Stay 500 yards away from tankers, passenger vessels, and U.S. naval ships. Stay 1,000 yards away from U.S. naval submarines. View 33 CFR 165.1301-1332 for all applicable regulated navigation areas. http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov

Useful Web Sources & Telephone Numbers:

⇒ Real time NOAA Data Buoy Information:
http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/maps/Northwest.shtm l

⇒ Washington State Ferry
Telephone: 800-982-8813
http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/

USCG Sector Puget Sound Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Telephone: 206-217-6050, 6151
www.psvts.us

Telephone: 800-982-8813

- Boats US course line Telephone: 800-336-2628
- Power Squadron: Telephone: 888-367-8777

United States Coast Guard